

Executive Summary

This Survey of demand for hackney carriage services has been undertaken on behalf of Brighton and Hove following the guidance of the April 2010 DfT Best Practice Guidance document, and all relevant case history in regard to unmet demand. This Executive Summary draws together key points from the main report that are needed to allow a committee to determine from the facts presented their current position in regard to the policy of limiting hackney carriage vehicle licences according to Section 16 of the 1985 Transport Act. It is a summary of the main report which follows and should not be relied upon solely to justify any decisions of a committee but must be read in conjunction with the full report below.

This latest in the regular series of reviews of the level of unmet demand in the Brighton and Hove licensing area was undertaken between February and August 2022. This review has included a test of demand in Spring as well as the main test undertaken at the same time as in the previous survey and has specifically considered the policies of increasing WAV levels and managed plate growth in addition to the more usual standard brief.

The authority continues to support development of the licensed vehicle fleet as an important part of the transport offer of the area. The overall industry structure allows a lot of freedom in operating models but as a result is very complex. The present policies and procedures around the managed growth see the authority in an excellent position to react to growth or decline more appropriately than many other areas around the country.

Estimated weekly passenger demand at ranks continues to decline survey on survey. However, even with the pandemic the current picture suggests a slowing of the decline given there was 28% decline 2015 to 2018 and 25% in the four years to the latest survey. However, as before, the picture is of the larger ranks generally growing and smaller ones declining, with some notable exceptions. The impact of reduced national rail patronage remains noticeable at both stations.

The area continues to see rank activity at some location in nearly every hour of the week. The hackney carriage fleet continues to be active in plying for hire, often covering several quiet locations by passing by regularly. The changes in both demand and supply resulting from the ongoing 'churn' instigated by the pandemic, Brexit and current world political instability have led to unmet demand levels increasing despite falling overall demand.

One notable rank usage increase is at the Hospital rank.

Observed levels of service were found to be provided by around 45% of the fleet on the busiest, Saturday (actually a marginal increase from 2018). The same observations found 69% of observed licensed vehicles being local hackney

carriages, 15% local private hire but 16% out of town vehicles. In 2018 75% were local hackney carriages.

A key value from the public interviews is that latent demand levels have reduced despite the increased levels of unmet demand. This, along with excellent reviews of elements of the service provided, suggests confidence in waiting at a rank or continuing to hail, is increased.

The trade remains very responsive to assisting the study, both from the individual and from the trade body / company levels. However, responses were dominated by concerns about the future of the industry and in particular concerns regarding the continued level of out of town operations very visible to them. However, there is some evidence from the public that their shift to app-based operations, particularly national ones, has reduced.

Levels of WAV activity remain higher at ranks than the actual proportion in the fleet. However, the level of observed wheel chair-based passengers remained similar to the levels in the last two surveys and relatively low. This is despite the area having unrivalled levels of WAV in both hackney carriage and private hire fleets for an area that retains a mixed vehicle fleet and does not have a mandatory policy.

The observed levels of unmet demand imply that the managed growth needs to continue at its present level to assist with the re-balancing of supply and demand that is still ongoing after the major shocks of the recent years to what was a well attuned operation.

There is strong need for the demand policy to be assisted by other elements of the authority with specific reference to ensuring zero tolerance of abuse of hackney carriage ranks which is a public safety concern and has an impact on the ability of the trade to adequately meet demand.

Soft elements of the licensed vehicle operation also need developing such as much stronger marketing of the Brighton and Hove licensed vehicle brand and increased focus on honest and open customer feedback and trade liaison in narrowing any gap between public expectation and trade delivery. A large number of good aspects of the present service need to be regularly put in the public domain whilst trade willingness to continually improve service needs to be both developed but also appreciated by those able to do so.

Recommendations

On the basis of the evidence gathered in this Survey of demand for hackney carriages services for Brighton and Hove, our key conclusion is that there is no evidence of any unmet demand for the services of hackney carriages either patent or latent which is significant at this point in time in the Brighton and Hove licensing

area. The committee is therefore able to consider retaining its present limit on hackney carriage vehicle numbers and to be able to support this against any challenge if required. The strong negative changes in the ISUD index imply the managed growth remains important.

The options open to the committee therefore include the following:

- Retain limit at current level, removing the managed growth
- Continue managed growth for WAV
- Revise managed growth to switch to focus on environmental matters rather than WAV
- Remove the limit altogether (with various possible options from with no further restriction to quality controls such as in favour of environmentally friendly vehicle options).

At the same time the related policy regarding all replacement vehicles having to become WAV also needs reconsideration.

Further thoughts are provided in the previous chapter giving reasons why particular options might be preferable at this time. Further discussion can occur at the presentation of this report if necessary.

There needs to be much more public and trade debate about the issue of disability service across the licensed vehicle service. The trade needs to identify clearly what they consider to be good service to those with disabilities and ensure this is communicated to the public and those contravening the code of practice see strong discipline applied preferably from within the trade as well as by the licensing authority.

This could perhaps be led by a marketing campaign encouraging both negative and positive feedback regarding the full licensed trade operation to be regularly shared by people. This could also draw in the issue of non-local vehicle service to the public.

